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**Influence of peers on talent identification for players in  
rugby clubs in Kenya**

**MICHAEL D. OTIENO, JACOB NTEERE**

Department of Physical Education and Sport,  
University of Nairobi, Kenya

**VINCENT ONYWERA**

Department of Recreation Management and Exercise Science,  
Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

**WINSTON AKALA**

Department of Educational Administration and Planning,  
University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya

**Abstract**

*The quality of the relationship between adolescents and their peers, as well as the type of peers they associate with, play important roles in aiding or impeding their career choices (Alika, 2012). The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate the influence of peers on talent identification for players in rugby clubs in Kenya. The peer attributes included rugby being viewed as a prestigious sport, social interaction and health and fitness gains. Data were collected using Questionnaires and interviews from rugby players (n= 125) and coaches (n=15) during the 2016/2017 Kenya Rugby Union league competition. Data were analyzed through both descriptive and inferential statistics of Chi- square test of independent measures. Results indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between the influence of peers and talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya, accepted. In addition, the most influential peer attribute was confirmed as health and fitness gains. The study recommends the use of friends as a key socio-economic variable*

*for talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya. Other studies involving the rest of the socio-cultural attributes that are likely to impact on talent identification like family, coaches, schools, club infrastructure, need to be conducted.*

**Key words:** *Rugby, rugby players, coaches, Kenya Rugby Union*

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## **Introduction**

Peer influence is emerging as a potentially powerful influencing factor in the amount of physical activity a child participates in (Rittenhouse, 2008). Holt, Black, Tamminen, Fox and Mandigo (2008) suggest that the acceptance of an individual amongst peers is linked to an increased physical self-worth, internalized positive feelings and a great desire to engage in physical activity.

Weiss, Smith and Theeboom (1996) also indicated that children turn to their friends for the following positive dimensions: companionship; pleasant play association; enhancement of self-esteem; help and guidance; loyalty; things in common; emotional support. This view was upheld by Kubayi, Jooste, Toriola and Paul (2014) who concluded that peers are not only influential in sport but also other aspects of life.

Rugby is a very popular sport and is played from primary school to senior level in more than a hundred countries worldwide (Gent & Spammer, 2005). Certain anthropometric, physical, motor abilities and game-specific variables can distinguish between talented and less talented rugby players (Gent & Spammer, 2005). Hare (1997) however came to the conclusion, after having researched the identification of rugby talent in the senior secondary school phase, that all elite rugby players have certain anthropometric components, rugby specific skills and physical and motor components that distinguish them from average players.

Kenya has asserted her authority at playing the rugby sevens version of the game. Since 2004, Kenya has been a core member of the World Rugby sevens series and has also played in 3 successive sevens world cups and even reached the semi finals of the 2009 sevens world cup. They repeated the feat again at the 2013 sevens world cup held in Moscow where they attained fourth position. The peak of their performance was when they won the world rugby series Singapore leg in April 2016. However Kenya, like other third world countries, continues to lag light years behind the top rugby playing nations such as South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and England in the fifteens version of the game. This could be due to lack of structured youth development programs both nationally and at club level. Lack of a professional league also means that several of the country's most talented players quit playing early either immediately after high school or in their early twenties, due to lack of incentives.

Indeed as it appears that peer influences has an impact on physical activity, could it then have an influence on the development of rugby in Kenya? Moreover for success to be achieved in the sport in Kenya certain developmental programs need to be put in place. Why not start with talent identification? According to Falk, Lander, Lang and Lido (2004) talent identification and development have become a vital component of many sport programs. Research on this in Kenya is also minimal though there are researchers like Oketch (2012) whose study focused on the psychological satisfaction of male Kenya Rugby Union registered university rugby players with technical and institutional managerial support and Abisai (2014) who researched on assets and modes of identification and development of talented student athletes in selected sport disciplines in Kenyan universities. There studies have however not covered aspects of talent identification in the sport rugby. It is in this line that the study investigated the influence of peers on talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya. The study was guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To elucidate the role of peers on talent identification of rugby clubs in Kenya
- 2) To determine the attributes that could have an influence on talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya

Based on the objectives of the study, the following null hypothesis was formulated:

Ho There is no significant relationship between the influence of peers and talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya

## Literature Review

A study by Kubayi, Jooste, Toriola and Paul (2014) was designed to investigate the influences of family and peers on sport participation amongst adolescents in secondary schools at Hlanganani rural area of Limpopo Province, South Africa. A total of 172 learners (108 females and 64 males) attending three public secondary schools in Hlanganani rural area volunteered to participate in the study. The results indicated that for both boys and girls, friends encouraged them to participate in sports with the boys reporting more peer support than the girls.

Another study by Orunaboka and Deemua (2011) examined the peer group influence on sports involvement of female athletes in Rivers State secondary schools of Nigeria. Data was collected from a sample of 102 female athletes, randomly selected from 17 secondary schools that took part in the 2003 All Secondary Schools Sports Festival in Rivers State. Results from the study indicated that peer groups significantly influence the sports involvement of female athletes in Rivers State secondary schools. The research however suffers from gender bias as it only used females and might not be relevant to this research.

Carnes (2014) in a study in which the purpose of investigation was to determine the effect of the presence of a same sex and fitness, matched peer, versus an alone condition, on recreational runners' behavior and liking during an acute bout of submaximal exercise. Recreational runners ( $n = 12$  male,  $n = 12$  female) completed three experimental trials, each under a different social condition, in a randomized order. Each trial consisted of self-paced running for a duration voluntarily determined by the participant. The three social conditions were: alone, with a sex and fitness matched familiar peer, or with a sex and fitness matched unfamiliar peer. Running duration, distance travelled, average speed, liking, and RPE were assessed in each trial. Mixed model regression analysis showed no significant main effect of social condition or interaction effects ( $p \geq 0.40$ ) for any of the dependent variables. The presence of either a familiar or unfamiliar peer does not appear to affect recreational runners' enjoyment or voluntarily selected duration or intensity of a single submaximal exercise session.

The purpose of another study by Rittenhouse (2008) was to determine the amount and intensity of physical activity children perform in a controlled setting, by themselves, with a peer who is of similar weight and with a peer of different weight. During each of the three conditions, children were fitted with an accelerometer and had access to both physical activities and sedentary activities for a total of 30 minutes. The total number of accelerometer counts, sedentary and physical activity time, liking, and RPE for each condition were recorded and compared across all three conditions. Two-way ANOVAs demonstrated significant group by treatment interactions for accelerometer counts ( $p = 0.008$ ), sedentary activity time ( $p = 0.017$ ) and liking ( $p = 0.009$ ). Overweight boys accumulated fewer accelerometer counts ( $p = 0.001$ ) and participated in greater amounts of sedentary time ( $p = 0.007$ ) than lean boys in the alone condition with no differences in the with-peer conditions ( $p \geq 0.50$ ). Overweight boys also increased their liking score from the alone condition to the with different weight peer condition, while liking scores for the lean boys were not significantly altered ( $8.2 \pm 1.9$  cm to  $7.4 \pm 3.2$  cm,  $p = 0.262$ ). These results highlight a potentially greater need for peer interaction in the at-risk-for/overweight boys to increase physical activity and liking of that activity.

Most of the studies therefore appear to indicate that peer influence has an impact on physical activity though the influence of peer groups on talent identification is still a relatively an unexplored area in Kenya. More specifically there is lack of information of the peer influence and how it impacts on talent identification for players in rugby clubs in Kenya and hence the need for the study.

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

A descriptive survey design was used to collect data.

### **Sample**

Data was collected from 95 rugby players and 15 rugby coaches from 25 rugby clubs who competed in the 2016/2017 Kenya Rugby Union league competitions. The study targeted 125 players and 25 coaches but only 95 players' responded and 15 coaches were available for interviews representing response rates of 76% and 60% respectively

### **Research Instruments**

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the rugby players. Section A of the questionnaire included demographics like age, playing experience, academic qualifications and occupation. Section B focused on the aspects of peer influence that may have influenced talent identification in the rugby clubs.

The interview schedule that was used to collect data from the rugby coaches had the first part consisting of demographic information on the interviewee such as age, educational background, coaching certification level and coaching experience. The second part focused on peer influence and whether or not this may have influenced the talent identification process.

In both test instruments items on the influence of talent identification had a ranking response scale of very influential, influential, fairly influential and not influential. For the rest of the items both open-ended and close ended questions were used.

The instruments were validated by a team of lecturers from the school of education at the University of Nairobi who were specialists in research methodology and the draft test instruments were modified based on their recommendations. The test instruments were also piloted using 15 players and 3 coaches from 3 clubs who did not participate in the study. A test-re-test technique was subsequently used to test for reliability and the Pearson's Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation ( $r$ ) formula was used to correlate the pre-test and post-test results in order to determine the coefficient of reliability. The test was re-administered after 2 weeks.

The reliability coefficients were 0.78 for the questionnaires and 0.73 for the interview schedules. The responses were coded and analyzed using both descriptive (percentages and frequencies) and inferential statistics (Chi-square test).

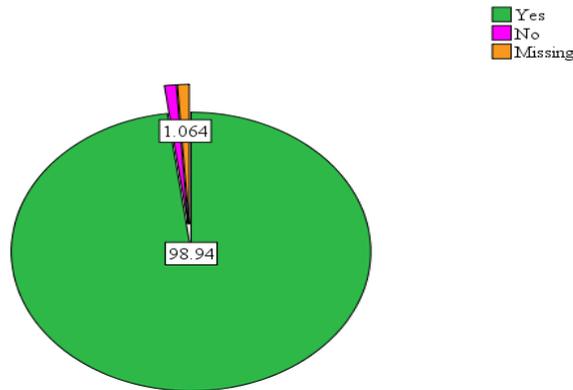
## **Results**

### **Demographic data of players**

Information that was included in the players' personal data was names of their clubs, age bracket, highest level of education and occupation. This information was to enable the researcher to establish the status of the players in relation to their being identified by their rugby clubs to play in the Kenya Rugby Union league competitions.

**Friends who play rugby**

The players were asked to indicate if they had any friends who played the game of rugby. The results are presented in Figure 1



*Figure 1: Players’ responses on friends who play rugby*

From the findings in Figure 1, the majority of the players (98.9%) indicated that they had friends who play rugby while 1.1% reported that they did not have friends who play rugby.

**Influence of peers on the talent identification process**

The players were then asked to indicate if their peers had in any way influenced the talent identification process. The responses are presented in Table 1

*Table 1: Players’ response on influence of peers on talent identification*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	71	74.7
No	23	24.2
No response	1	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings in Table 1 show that majority of the player (74.7 %) indicated that their peers had indeed influenced the talent identification process while 24.2 % of the players indicated that their peers had no influence on the talent identification process. One player did not respond to this item.

**Coaches’ response on the influence of peers on talent identification**

The coaches were asked to indicate if there is an element of peer influence when identifying talent in their clubs. All the 15 coaches indicated that the peers had an influence on the talent identification process. They were further asked to identify the attributes of peers that were most influential. The results are presented in Figure 2.

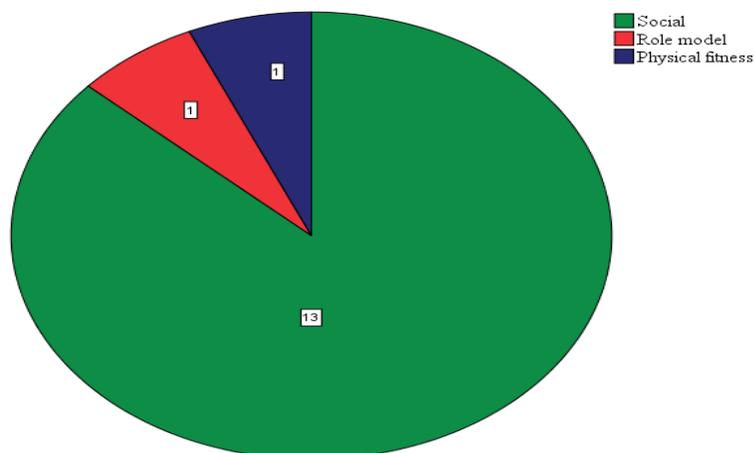


Figure 2: Coaches response on influence of peers on talent identification

Figure 2 shows that 86 % of the coaches indicated that social activities amongst the peers was most influential attribute while 7 % of the coaches reported the role model attribute as the most influential while 7 % considered physical fitness as the most influential peer attribute on the talent identification process.

**Cross tabulation of the peer attributes on their influence on the talent identification process**

The three attributes of peer influence that were specified in the test instruments were rugby viewed as a prestigious sport, rugby viewed as a socially acceptable sport and rugby viewed in terms of fitness and health gains. The attributes were cross tabulated and the results of the cross tabulations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Cross tabulation on role of peers on talent identification

		Peer influence on talent identification					
		Yes		No		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Rugby viewed as a prestigious sport	Most influential	26	38.8	7	41.2	33	100
	Influential	25	37.5	4	23.5	29	100
	Fairly influential	12	17.9	3	17.6	15	100
	Least influential	4	6.0	3	17.6	7	100
	Missing	0	0.0	11	100.0	11	100
<b>Total</b>		<b>67</b>	<b>79.8</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>
Rugby viewed as a socially acceptable sport	Most influential	19	28.4	6	33.3	25	100
	Influential	37	55.2	7	38.9	44	100
	Fairly influential	7	10.4	4	22.2	11	100
	Least influential	4	6.0	1	5.6	5	100

	Missing	0	0.0	10	100.0	10	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>79.8</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>
Rugby viewed in terms of health and fitness gains	Most influential	35	52.2	7	41.2	42	100
	Influential	19	28.4	6	35.3	25	100
	Fairly influential	4	6.0	2	11.8	6	100
	Least influential	9	13.4	2	11.8	11	100
	Missing	0	0.0	11	100.0	11	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>79.8</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100</b>

The study established that the three sets of attributes had an impact on talent identification for the rugby clubs. Table 2 shows that 38.8 % viewed rugby as a prestigious sport and this had an influence when they were being identified while 25 % of the players who viewed it as a prestigious sport indicated that it had no influence when they were being identified to join their rugby clubs. Only 17.6% of the respondents indicated that rugby wasn't viewed as a prestigious sport and that this had no influence on the talent identification process.

55.2 % of the players indicated that rugby being viewed as a socially acceptable sport is influential and that it had an influence when they were being identified. 6 % of the respondents indicated that rugby being viewed as a socially acceptable sport was least influential during the talent identification process while 5.6 % players indicated that that rugby being viewed as a socially acceptable sport was not influential during the talent identification process.

The results of the study also show that 52.2 % of the players indicated that rugby viewed in terms of health and fitness gains was most influential in the talent identification process while 11.8% of the respondents indicated that the aspect of rugby being viewed in terms of health and fitness gains was least influential in the talent identification process.

A chi-square test was done to determine the significance of the difference between role of peers and talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya. The results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Chi-Square Tests on the role of peers on talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya**

	Value	Df	p-value
Rugby viewed as a prestigious sport	2.985	3	.394
Rugby viewed as a socially acceptable sport	2.375	3	.526
Rugby viewed in terms of health and fitness gains	1.217	3	.749

From Table 3, the p-value 0.394, 0.526 and 0.749 > 0.05 gives an average p-value of 0.556. The conclusion was therefore to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between the influence of peers and talent identification for rugby clubs in Kenya

## Discussion

The findings reveal that that peers have a significant influence on talent identification for rugby players in Kenya. This is not surprising as rugby in Kenya has been associated with a high level of social interaction amongst peers. The study results agree with the study by Orunaboka and Deemua (2011) who concluded that peer groups significantly influence sport involvement though their study was based on female athletes. More specifically the findings concur with the results of the study by Kubayi et al (2014) which was designed to investigate the influences of family and peers on sport participation amongst adolescents in secondary schools at Hlanganani rural area of Limpopo Province, South Africa. They concluded that for both boys and girls, friends encouraged them to participate in sports with the boys reporting more peer support than the girls. To support the role of peers in sport participation in Kenya, Mukolwe and Andanje (2009) stated that students should chose friends who will contribute towards positive development in various aspects. They also recommended to parents and teachers to use the powerful influence of students' peer groups to instill positive attitudes towards school life. The findings are therefore consistent with those of Rittenhouse (2008) who indicated that peer influence is emerging as a potentially powerful influencing factor in the amounts of physical activity a child participates in. This is also echoed in Salvy et al (2009) findings that friendships may increase youths' motivation to engage in physical activity.

Secondly the study also aimed at establishing which attribute under the role of peers played a significant role. The findings indicate that the attribute under role of peers with the highest p-value is health and fitness gains at a value 0.749. This result agrees with Keresztes et al (2008) who reported that health promotion programs should build on possible social influences, i.e. the role of peers, parents and significant others in general, in fostering adolescents' physical activity. Interestingly social interaction has been viewed by the coaches as the attribute with the most significant peer influence for rugby players but the findings indicate that there has been a shift to health and fitness gains. This is interesting and could be attributed to a better understanding of the health and fitness gains from the sport as most of the players are university graduates are therefore better placed to understand the health and fitness gains

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established that peer influence has a significant influence on talent identification for rugby players in Kenya. In addition all the coaches and the majority of the players suggested that peer influence was significant in influencing the talent identification process. Social attributes were ranked as most influential by the coaches though the study findings revealed that health and fitness gains as the most influential peer attribute. It therefore seems that as much as social interaction has been the 'in thing in' the game for the rugby players in Kenya, attitudes and role modeling are shifting more toward the conditioning benefits and health gains of the game.

It will be necessary to identify ways and means in which the peers could be attracted to associate with the club before the talent identification process takes place The rugby coaches should utilize this finding by encouraging the rugby players to convince their rugby playing friends to join their clubs and use the peer influence as a critical factor in the talent identification process. The clubs should also encourage the players to bring along their rugby playing friends during training and match days to enable them to integrate and associate with the club. A good strategy would be to guarantee free entry to the peers during match days to enhance the association.

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